No. 1 of a GRAND NEW PICTURE PAPER

The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen™
1
EGYPTIANS BESET BY MONSTROUS OCCURRENCE
LADY 'WITH PAST' KEPT PECULIAR COMPANY
MISS MURRAY AN ARTISTS IMPRESSION
AN AFFRONT TO WOMANHOOD IN FOREIGN PARTS
OPIUM-A HEATHEN CURSE ON CHRISTENDOM
STRANGE MYSTERY OF THE HINDU MARINER
QUIETLY MURDERER STALKS PARIS FLESHPOTS

Vol. 1 No. 1(of 6) MAR $2.95 $4.70 CAN

by ALAN MOORE & KEVIN O'NEILL

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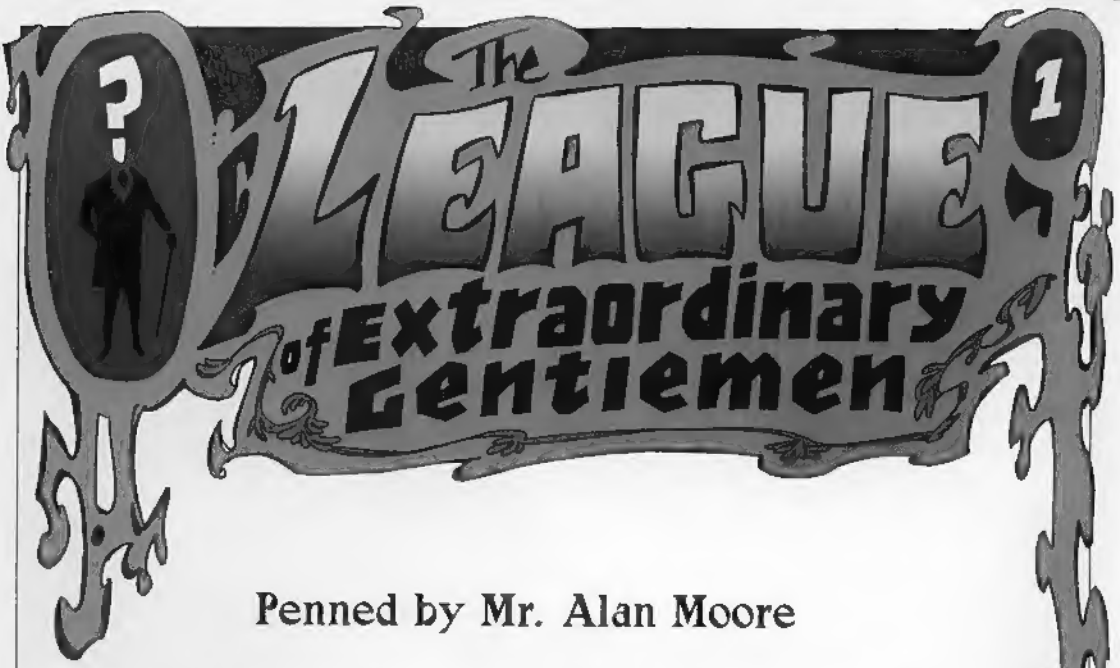

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God Bless Her Majesty!

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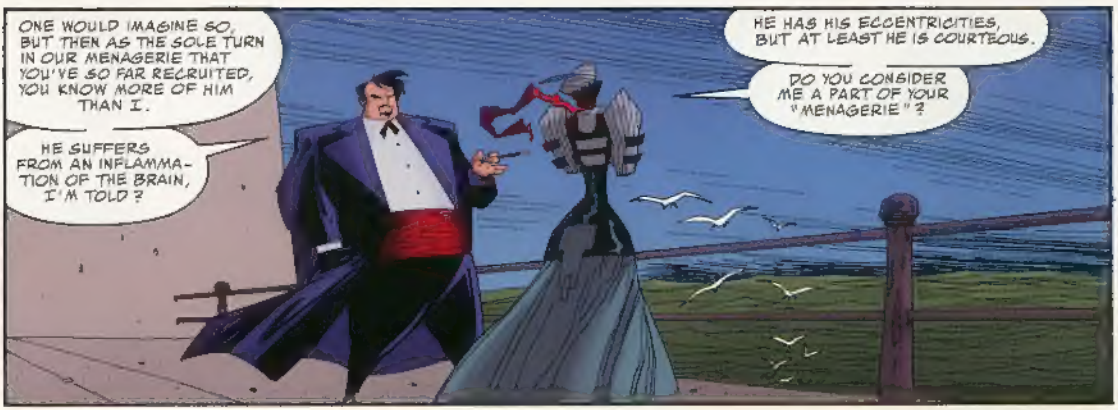
Dover. May, 1898.
John Bull
SIMPLY NO MATCH
BRYANT & MAY-LONDON
FIRST STRIKE
MR. BOND.
GOOD DAY TO YOU, SIR.
OH PLEASE, MISS MURRAY, DO CALL ME CAMPION... AND PERHAPS IN RETURN, I MIGHT REFER TO YOU AS "WILHELMINA"?
SIMPLY REMARKABLE, THE VIEW HERE, ISN'T IT?

PRINTED IN CANADA

REMARKABLE.
AND "MISS MURRAY" WILL BE QUITE SUFFICIENT.
INDUSTRY
ALBION REACH
1: Empire Dreams

AS YOU WISH.
IT MUST HAVE RATHER HURT YOUR FORMER HUSBAND'S FEELINGS, MUSTN'T IT? REVERTING TO YOUR MAIDEN NAME LIKE THAT? I DARE SAY THE POOR CHAP'S MORTIFIED.
THANKFULLY, MY FORMER HUSBAND'S FEELINGS ARE NO LONGER MY CONCERN. NOR ARE THEY YOURS.
I TAKE IT THAT THE CAPTAIN WILL BE HERE SOON?


ONE WOULD IMAGINE SO, BUT THEN AS THE SOLE TURN IN OUR MENAGERIE THAT YOU'VE SO FAR RECRUITED, YOU KNOW MORE OF HIM THAN I.
HE SUFFERS FROM AN INFLAMMATION OF THE BRAIN, I'M TOLD?
HE HAS HIS ECCENTRICITIES, BUT AT LEAST HE IS COURTEOUS.
DO YOU CONSIDER ME A PART OF YOUR "MENAGERIE"?

DEAR LADY, WHAT AM I TO SAY? YOUR HISTORY HAS PLACED YOU FAR BEYOND THE SOCIAL PALE. DIVORCE IS ONE THING, BUT THAT OTHER BUSINESS...
RAVISHED BY A FOREIGNER AND ALL THAT. QUITE AGAINST YOUR WILL, OF COURSE, BUT THEN PEOPLE DO TALK SO, DON'T THEY?

YES.
I'M AFRAID THEY DO.

STILL, CHIN UP, eh? AS WE SEE, ENGLAND HAS A PLACE FOR YOU, IN THE EMPLOY OF MY SUPERIOR.
OH, YES. THE GENTLEMAN WHO'S KNOWN BY HIS INITIAL, LIKE A SEA-SIDE LANDLORD: MR. M.
WE BOTH KNOW VERY WELL IT'S MYCROFT HOLMES WE'RE SPEAKING OF. WHY NOT SIMPLY ADMIT IT?
THAT IS SURMISE UPON YOUR PART, ABOUT MATTERS WHICH NEED NOT CONCERN YOU.
YOUR TASK IS TO FIND THIS CHAP IN CAIRO, OR WHATEVER'S LEFT OF HIM. TELL HIM HOW MUCH HIS COUNTRY NEEDS HIM...
... FOR A MENAGERIE, OF COURSE. DON'T WORRY, MR. BOND. I WON'T LET YOU DOWN.
PLEASE DON'T. WE LIVE IN TROUBLED TIMES, WHERE FRETFUL DREAMS SETTLE UPON THE EMPIRE'S BROW.
IF ENGLAND'S TO SURVIVE THEM, THEN YOUR WORK IS VITAL. BE ABOUT IT VIGOROUSLY AND WITHOUT DELAY, FOR THE SHADOWS OF THE CENTURY GROW LONG...
... AND YOUR CHARIOT APPROACHES.

Cairo, June, 1898.
من هنا يا آنسة
متشكرة على مساعدتك الكبيرة ليه
اللى بتضورى عليه من هنا

MR. QUATERMAIN?
GO AWAY.
MY NAME IS WILHELMINA MURRAY.
YOUR COUNTRY HAS NEED OF YOU AGAIN, SIR.
SIR, I HAD HEARD BETTER OF YOU.
IS THERE NOTHING LEFT OF WHAT YOU WERE?
I SEE.
THEN MAY THE GOOD LORD HELP THE EMPIRE, SIR, IF THERE ARE NO MEN FINER THAN YOURSELF...
...TO GUARD HER?
SIR? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
سيبني دلوعتى حالا
تعالي نبعده يا ست .. إحنا مش وحشين أوى كده هوه كاس واحد و مش حتحسى بحاجه
AAA! YOU FILTHY BRUTE, WHAT...?
OHHH!
تعالى .. خليكى حلوه معانا

OH, GOD! OH GOD, NO...
أيوه ... كده احسن
AAA!
STOP IT! THE BRITISH EMBASSY KNOWS I'M HERE! THEY'LL...
ده حيعجبك ، ده إحنا حبيبه حلوين أوى
DON'T! DON'T PUSH, OR I'LL...
ابعدوا عنها .... و إلا و الله اكسر دماغكو
خلاص ، كفايه كده
و الله لتءفلو ب ءاها
I WON'T ALLOW THIS! I WON'T...
ده بيهجص .. بص على شكله .. ده مدمر خالص
و دلوءتى أنا حاخليك حشره زيهم
انت عايش زي الميت ، مع الحشرات
يا ابن الكلب ، انت اتلت اخويا ... ده أنا حاءطع ألبك ....

انت مش حاتفضل تعبان كده
على طول ....أ.ريب
.. حا ...

يا ابن الزانيه
، يا ابن الكلب .
urrhh...
D-DAMN YOU, YOU HEATHEN COWARD. HIT A MAN WHEN HE'S SICK...

إنجليزي شرير
.... حقير
...وسخ ...
ghunnnghh...

تموت ... ؟

MR. QUATERMAIN ?
uhh... YES. YES, OF COURSE.
I THINK, SIR, IT WOULD BE EXPEDIENT FOR US TO MAKE OUR SWIFT DEPARTURE.
TH-THE WAY OUT'S THROUGH THAT CURTAIN.

صحابى اتلونى
متخليهمش يهربوا ..

WELL, THAT'S TORN EVERYTH NG!
FOR GOD'S SAKE, WOMAN I M A SICK MAN WHY ARE YOU DOING TH.S TO ME, MIGS .,?
MURRAY WILHELMINA MURRAY PLEASE BE QUIET, SIR WE MUST GET YOU TO THE DOCKS
DOCKS? I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOJ HAD CONNECTIONS AT THE EMBASSY?
I CONFESS I MAY HAVE EMBROIDERED THE TRLTH A L TTLE N THAT REGARD
HOWEVER, I HAVE A FRIEND WAITING AT THE WATERFRONT
YOU RE MAD' I'LL NEVER MAKE T EVEN F I DO, WHERE SHALL I GET MY OPIUM?
IN HEAVEN S NAME BE A MAN SIR! YOJR PITIFUL WHIN NG SICKENS ME
NOW HURRY! THEY ARE ALMOST ON LS!
I DON T CARE. I JUST WANT TO GO TO SLEEP
NO! YOU RE ALLAN QUATERMA N AND YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU! I NEED YOJ.
.. MOST ESPECIALLY SINCE I CANNOT SEE MY FRIEND THE CAPTA N ANYWHERE
I DON'T UNDERSTAND HE GAVE ME HIS WORD AS A GENTLEMAN THAT HE WOULD MEET ME HERE
S-SIR, I FEAR THAT YOU ARE RIGHT AND I HAVE DOOMED JS BOTH
GOD'S TEETH
M SS MURRAY ?
FORGIVE ME BJT S T THE OPIUM,
.. OR CAN YOU SEE THAT AS WELL?

MEMESAH B MURRAY GOOD AFTERNOON
PLEASE COME ABOARD IF I MUST HAVE WOMEN ON MY SHIP, IT S PREFERABLE THEY ARE ALIVE, I THINK
BUT CAPTAIN, THE MOB
A MOHAMMEDAN RABBLE PLEASE LEAVE THEM TO ME
حيوعالنا ...
متخلوش الشياطين البيض دول يهربوا! الكبير النهيل ده مش

THERE AND HOW IS THE GREAT COLONIAL EXPLORER THAT YOUR EMPIRE SENT YOU HERE TO SALVAGE?
RATHER A MESS, I'M AFRAID AND I THINK YOU'LL FIND IT'S OUR EMPIRE CAPTAIN
NO THE INDIAN MUTINEERS MAY HAVE SURRENDERED BUT I DID NOT
IF I WORK WITH THE BRITISH IT IS BECAUSE I NO LONGER FEEL EVEN INDIAN. THE SEA NOW IS MY ONLY NATION
THEN WE ARE BOTH MADE STRANGERS IN OUR HOMELANDS EXILES LIKE OUR NEW ACQUAINTANCE HERE
P-PLEASE I FEEL SO SICK NEED MY MEDICINE
YOU ARE ABOARD MY SHIP SIR AND MY REMEDIES ARE BITTER
WHO SAID THAT? EVERYTHING'S SHIMMERING AND OUT OF FOCUS
I SEE YOU ONLY DIMLY SIR IF YOU ARE REAL AND NOT SOME OPIUM DJINN SENT TO TORMENT ME, TELL ME WHO YOU ARE
NO ONE

Hmm
MR. QUATERMAN LOOKS SOMEWHAT LESS FRANTIC THAN HE DID YESTERDAY, DON'T YOU THINK?

HE COULD SCARCELY BE WORSE HE WAS RAVING ABOUT DIAMOND MINES AGAIN DURING THE NIGHT HE CALLED FOR SOME-ONE CALLED "UMSLOPOGAAS
TO THINK I GREW UP READ-ING OF HIS EXPLOITS
...JUST AS I READ OF YOURS QUATERMAIN HOWEVER WAS ALWAYS THE EMPIRE'S FAVOURITE SON. YOU WERE TS NIGHTMARE
THE WINNING SIDE WRITES THE HISTORY BOOKS MISS MURRAY
BUT WHAT OF YOU? WHAT OF YOUR HISTORY?
WHY WOULD YOUR BRITISH SECRET SERVICE PLACE A MUSIC TEACHER IN THE COMPANY OF MEN AS DANGEROUS AS QUATERMAIN OR MYSELF? YOU ARE NOT QUALIFIED
DANGEROUS MEN? WHY CAPTAIN YOU HAVE NO IDEA
AS FOR MY QUALIFICATIONS THEY MUST REMAIN MY OWN AFFAIR I TRUST SIR AS A GENTLEMAN, YOU WILL NOT PRESS ME
NOW NOW SOON SHALL WE ARRIVE IN FRANCE?
WE HAVE ANOTHER DAY AND NIGHT BEFORE WE DOCK IN PARIS
MR QUATERMAIN I TRUST, WILL HAVE SUCCESSFULLY SUBDUED HIS DEMONS BY THAT TIME
ONE HOPES SO
BECAUSE IF WHAT MY CONTACT MONSIEUR DUPIN TELLS ME IN HIS LETTERS IS CORRECT
WELL IT WOULD SEEM THAT PARIS HAS SUFFICIENT DEMONS OF ITS OWN

Paris. Late June, 898
MR QUATERMAIN?
ARE YOU UNWELL?
OF COURSE NOT. I'M... I'M JUST A LITTLE RESTLESS. THAT'S ALL.
YOU CAN HARDLY BLAME ME. PRESS-GANGED INTO SOMETHING I DON'T UNDERSTAND BY MY OWN COUNTRY, AND NOW THIS FRENCH DOTARD WE'RE ABOUT TO MEET LATE
WHY COULDN'T YOUR BUCCANEER FRIEND BE HERE INSTEAD OF ME?
THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES BELIEVE THE CAPTAIN DEAD SINCE THE "MYSTERIOUS STRANGER" AFFAIR FIFTEEN YEARS AGO. IT'S BETTER HE REMAINS ABOARD SHIP
IT'S BETTER HE REMAINS DEAD! DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH?
THAT'S CAPTAIN NEMO. NEMO THE MADMAN. NEMO THE SCIENCE-PIRATE
PREFERABLE, SURELY, TO QUATERMAIN THE OPIUM-SOT? I HAVE YOU MAY BELIEVE ME, MET WITH MANY DEPLORABLE SPECIMENS OF HUMANITY, BUT YOU...
MADAME. THAT'S ENOUGH. I PRAY GOD THAT ALL ENGLISHWOMEN ARE NOW OF YOUR MANLY ILK
AHH. LES ANGLAISES
ALWAYS THE FRIENDS

HM? I BEG YOUR PARDON?
SO YOU SHOULD YOU ARE VERY LOUD AND D SAGREEABLE. MONSIEUR I AM AUGUSTE DUPIN
THE CHEVALIER DUPIN? IT IS AN HONOUR S R I AM M SS MURRAY WE VE CORRE SPONDED

CERTAINMENT YOU ARE THE CATSPAWS OF MONSIEUR BOND NON?
YOU CALL DUPIN FROM HIS RETIREMENT WHEN YOU NEED HIS HELP
AS I UNDERSTOOD IT, T WAS THAT OUR NTERESTS CO N- CIDED WITH YOUR OWN

Hmmph. WELL, THAT MAY BE
AN OLD CASE OF MINE CLOSED LONG AGO, SEEMS TO HAVE SPRUNG OPEN AGA N YOUR MONSIEUR BOND EXPRESSED AN INTEREST
COME FOLLOW ME I LL TAKE YOU TO THE STREET TSELF

STREET? WHAT STREET WOULD THAT BE, S R? I HAD BELIEVED THAT I WAS HERE TO F ND A MISS NG ENGL SHMAN, A DOCTOR
WHAT YOU BELIEVE, MADEMOISELLE, IS YOUR AFFA R. I ONLY KNOW WHAT I HAVE DEDUCED

AND WHAT M GHT THAT BE?
THAT THE MURDERS HAVE BEGUN AGA N
T STARTED MORE THAN F FTY YEARS AGO HERE N THE QUART ER ST ROCH A WOMAN AND HER DAUGHTER WERE DESTROYED W TH HORRIBLE FEROC TY

THIS STREET HERE BETWEEN THE RUE RICHEL EU AND THE RUE ST ROCH IN 1841
TH S IS WHERE T HAPPENED
MORGUE

THE OLDER WOMAN MADAME L'ESPANAYE, HAD BEEN ALMOST DECAPITATED WITH A RAZOR, THEN HURLED FROM THAT W NDOW
HER DAUGHTER CAM LE L ESPANAYE, HAD FIRST BEEN THROTTLED THEN THRUST FEET-FIRST UP A CH MNEY
A MYSTERY, NON ?
I-IT IS NDEED DID YOU REVEAL THE MAN RESPONSIBLE ?
T WAS NO MAN MADEMO SELLE IT WAS AN APE AN OURANG OUTANG ESCAPED FROM THE SA LOR THAT HAD OWNED T
SUCH WAS MY DEDUCTION AND YET...
AND YET ?
AND YET, TWO MONTHS AGO A LOCAL PROSTITUTE NAMED ANNA COUPEAJ WAS DISCOVERED WITH HER NECK SNAPPED
OTHER MURDERS FOLLOWED EACH DISPLAY NG THE SAME PRAETER HUMAN STRENGTH ALL THE VICT MS WERE PROSTITUTES
HOW LIKE LONDON'S STILL- UNCAPTURED WHITECHAPEL FIEND FROM TEN YEARS AGO PERHAPS THIS MISS NG DOCTOR I AM SEEKING IS ?
NO AGAIN TH S IS NO MAN. AN APE-L KE FIGURE WAS REPORTED FLEEING THE MURDER SCENES
I SEE AND YOUR ROLE N THE EARLIER CASE LED YOU TO THIS ONE ?
PARTLY. ALSO I .. I KNEW ANNA COUPEAL. "NANA," THEY CALLED HER
SHE D LED A HARD LIFE SHE D D NOT DESERVE SUCH TREATMENT
NO WOMAN DOES T SEEMS THERE S NOTHING FOR IT I MUST SET MYSELF AS BAIT
MONS EUR DUP N ? HOW MIGHT I PASS MYSELF OFF AS A DEM.- MONDAINE ?

THERE NOW DO I LOOK?
WELL, YOU LOOK THE PART, ALL RIGHT
THAT SCARF, THOUGH IT'S TOO MUCH. YOU SHOULD TAKE IT OFF
ABSOLUTELY NOT
NOW I SHALL LOITER NEAR THE GAS-FIXTURE DIRECTLY OPPOSITE. YOU GENTLEMEN MAY OBSERVE FROM EITHER END OF THE STREET, BLOCKING OUR QUARRY'S ESCAPE
BUT WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR!
AN APE-LIKE FIGURE DIDN'T THE CHEVALIER SAY? EVEN YOU SHOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE SPOTTING HIM.
SHE'S RIGHT. GO TAKE UP YOUR POSITION ON THE CORNER, WHILE I OCCUPY MY OWN
WATCH CAREFULLY NOW
Hmmph

OH MY GOD! DUPIN.
DUPIN!
WHAT'S IT? WHERE'S MADEMOISELLE MURRAY?
SH- SHE- THAT IS- I DON'T KNOW- I MUST HAVE LOOKED AWAY FOR A MOMENT, AND
UH
MONSIEUR, YOU ARE BOTH A WEAKLING AND A FOOL!
WE MUST BE QUICK! SHE CAN ONLY HAVE BEEN ABDUCTED BY THE RUE RICHELIEU
B-BUT HOW WILL WE FIND HER? IT'S LIKE A WARREN DOWN HERE
WE SHALL MAKE INQUIRIES
PARDONNEZ-MOI, MADEMOISELLE
BONSOIR PAPI ENCORE TOI?
JE CHERCHE UNE FEMME UNE PETITE BRUNE ELLE ÉTAIT AVEC UN CLIENT.

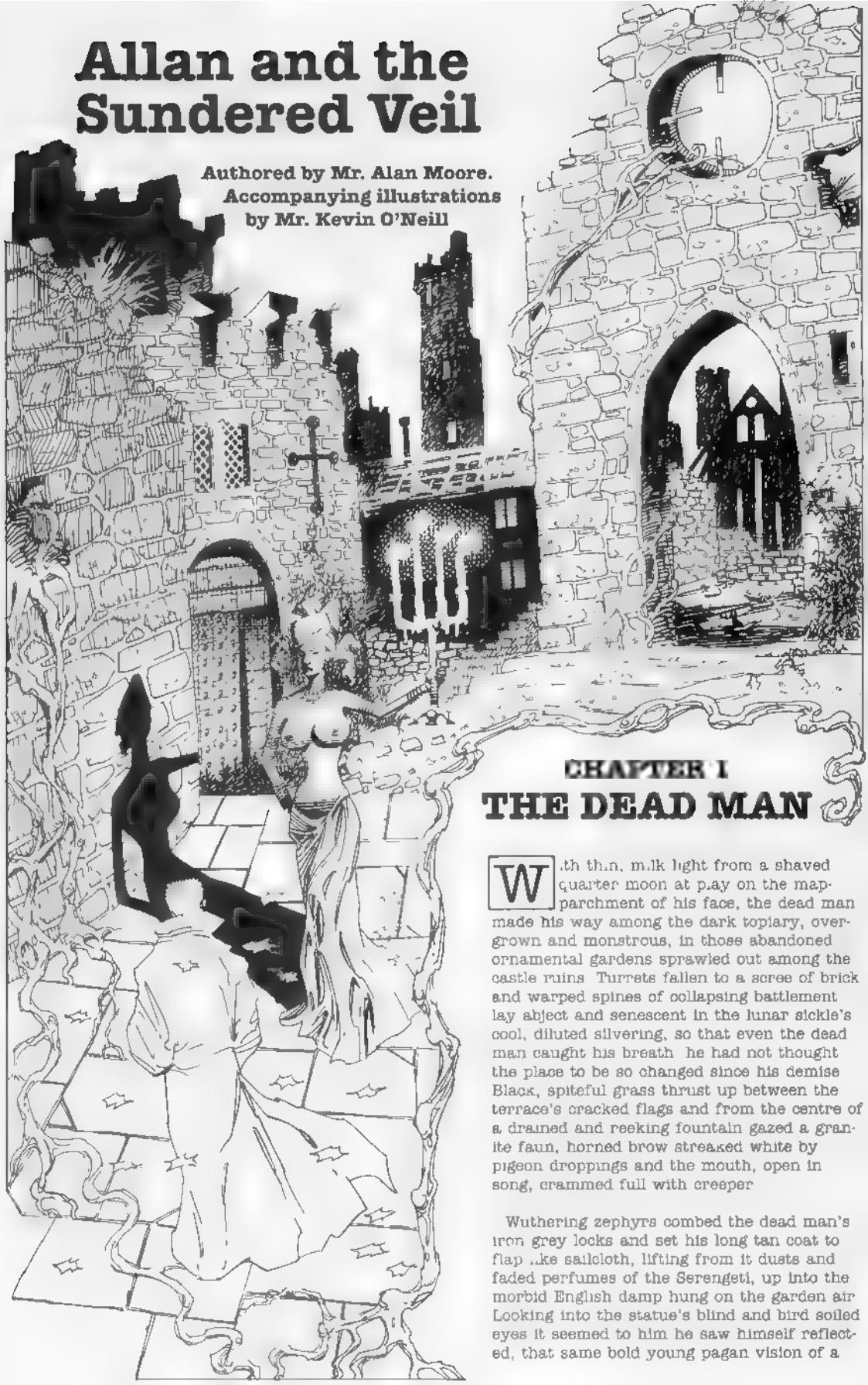
OH, JE L'AI VUE ME VOLER MON CLIENT! ELLE EST PARTIE PAR LÀ AVEC HENRI L'ANGLAIS. JE NE VAIS PAS DEUX MINUTES!
CET HENRI, C'EST UN HOMME COSTAUD, HEIN? UN VRAI GORILLE?
HENRI? C'EST UN PETIT ANGLAIS TOUT MINCE. IL A UNE PLAIE JUSTE AU COIN
MERCI, MADEMOISELLE.. VOUS M'AVEZ ÉTÉ TRÈS UTILE
WHAT DID SHE SAY?
THAT SHE SAW YOUR FRIEND WITH A SKINNY ENGLISHMAN NAMED HENRY. A PROSTITUTES REGULAR. HE LIVES ON THE CORNER
THEN MISS MURRAY MUST HAVE GONE WITH HIM THINKING HIM TO BE HER MISSING DOCTOR
THAT MAY BE. AT LEAST HE DOES NOT SOUND MUCH LIKE OUR MURDEROUS APE
HOWEVER, LET US KEEP OUR PISTOLS AT THE READY. THE APARTMENT IS SOMEWHERE AROUND
HERE
GREAT GOD. BE QUICK, MAN!
BACK IN '84 THE BEAST FIRST WRECKED THE ROOM AND ALL ITS FURNITURE!
THIS MUST BE THE DOOR OVER HERE.

EEEEIIIGH!
OH, GOD...
OH, GOD, NO! NO, DON'T...
MISS MURRAY! MISS MURRAY HOLD ON!
DEAR GOD! MISS MURRAY, WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT D.D HE . ?
-IN THERE HE S N THERE
I THOUGHT I COULD HANDLE HIM, AND THEN ..
AND THEN SOMETH NG. .
SOMETHING HAPPENED
SEE TO HER, DJP N'
ALL RIGHT WE KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE THE GAME S UP FOR YOU, YOJ ROGUE
COME ON OUT, "HENRY," OR WHOEVER YOU ARE!
I HAVE A PISTOL AND I DEMAND THAT YOU .
:hhuch:
HENRY?

Huhuh HENRY ISN T HOME
I'M EDWARD.
In the next number of our picture periodical there are further scenes to avert and astonish, including episodes of a bawdy nature that our Lady readers, being of a more delicate sens bility, may wish to avoid

Allan and the Sundered Veil

Authored by Mr. Alan Moore.
Accompanying illustrations by Mr. Kevin O'Neill



CHAPTER I
THE DEAD MAN

With thin, milk light from a shaved quarter moon at play on the map-parchment of his face, the dead man made his way among the dark topiary, overgrown and monstrous, in those abandoned ornamental gardens sprawled out among the castle ruins. Turrets fallen to a scree of brick and warped spines of collapsing battlement lay abject and senescent in the lunar sickle's cool, diluted silvering, so that even the dead man caught his breath. he had not thought the place to be so changed since his demise. Black, spiteful grass thrust up between the terrace's cracked flags and from the centre of a drained and reeking fountain gazed a granite faun, horned brow streaked white by pigeon droppings and the mouth, open in song, crammed full with creeper.

Wuthering zephyrs combed the dead man's iron grey locks and set his long tan coat to flap like sailcloth, lifting from it dusts and faded perfumes of the Serengeti, up into the morbid English damp hung on the garden air. Looking into the statue's blind and bird soiled eyes it seemed to him he saw himself reflected, that same bold young pagan vision of a

Allan and the Sundered Veil

glorious wilderness, betrayed, like him, by age Betrayed by time

So lost were his dead thoughts to rue and reverie, he did not hear the huge, worm peppered oak that was the castle's terrace door swing open at his back Save for a dull, faint tingle in the thin machete scar that ran across his neck there at the rear, below the hairline, he received no intimation that he was observed until the woman spoke behind him in low, soft-accented tones that whirled the dead man round to face her, wild and startled

"Lady Ragnall is expecting you. Her Ladyship will be pleased to receive you in the library Follow me, please "

The speaker was a striking negress, some few inches taller than the dead man was himself, clad in a long skirt of what looked like emerald velvet and hung all about with bracelets, beads and gaudy fetishes, a flickering candelabra held up in one slender hand Her hair was hidden by the turquoise wrapping of a turban, and before she turned from him to walk away down the decaying castle's silent hall he glimpsed the spiraling raised bumps of ritual disfigurements upon her cheeks, yet could not match the scarring's singular design with those of any similarly decorated tribe he had encountered while in Africa It seemed that he had no choice but to follow where she led, down corridors that twisted like intestines, winding ever deeper into the decaying mass of this once stately building, now a bleak and ghastly carcass

Walking briskly so that he might match the servant woman's stride the dead man marveled at the shifting tableau of fantastic despoliation that her candle-halo brought to light about them Here, garnet-eyed rats were nesting in the rubble of a great crashed chandelier that all but blocked the passage way before them both Here, long obliterated portraits were hung side by side among the roosting bats

How had the opulent Ragnall estates become reduced to this? More troubling still, how could it be that his dear former friend and patron Lady Ragnall yet resided here, in the chambers breached by rain, upon magnificent Axminster carpets annexed long since by the creep of moss and slug and fungus? When first he had glimpsed the moonlit relic of the castle he had known a pang of grief, believing that his wise and learned dowager companion must have passed on without issue, leaving her ancestral home and grounds to slide into the great and final disrepair of unreined nature. Grief was now replaced by an insidious and clinging apprehension as he followed the aloof and silent blackamoor between the rotting hanging tapestries, beneath a frescoed ceiling that would suddenly gape open on a patch of glinting and indifferent stars

At last the ebon beauty paused before a portal of smoke-damaged cedar that the dead man recognized as having been the entrance to the castle library, though now adorned by great and leaping dog tongues of black soot, the remnants of some earlier catastrophe. Placing one hand upon the door's brass lion-head knob, now streaked with verdigris, the servant woman turned her cool and level stare once more upon the dead man at her heel Limned by the yellow, stuttering radiance of the candelabra that she held aloft, her high boned face could now be seen more clearly, with the raised dots of her ritual scars uncoiling like two serpents from her cheeks and rearing up along her temples to curl inward at the shaved and hairless browline, meeting at a point between her green and ocean-cryptic eyes Her alien glamour and her self-possession breathed upon the long-spent ashes of the dead man's passion, nursing embers back to life amongst cold cinders he had thought long since extinguished. If perhaps he were a younger man and bore the marks of fewer wounds upon his body and heart .? He grimaced and suppressed a rueful laugh Perhaps if he were still alive? The bruised and luscious fruits that were her lips moved almost not at all as she pushed wide the ruined library door, and spoke her first words since she had encountered him upon the weed-cracked terrace

Allan and the Sundered Veil

"Lady Ragnall waits on you within."

Dazed by the strangeness of his circumstances, he stepped past her and into the high-roofed room beyond, where for a moment he was dazzled by what seemed a thousand scintilla of light on every side, resolving as his eyes became accustomed to the glitter into dozen upon dozens of wax candles, fabulous grotesques of spilling tallow set at random on the many mantles, shelves and surfaces contained within the library. There at the center of this glittering firmament, couched deep within the threadbare covers of a great bed made from two divans pushed one against the other was the gaunt and altered form of Lady Ragnall, quite unrecognizable save for the dancing animation in her clever eyes, sunk low within the wrinkled darkness of their sockets. Glancing up, their quick, voracious gaze settled upon the dead man Parched lips creasing into a painted smile, at last she spoke, voice thin and cracked yet somehow poignant, like a broken harpsichord

"Dear Mr Quatermain. How good of you to come I've been expecting you, though all good sense informed me I should not."

Her smile here seemed to broaden, taking on a somewhat sly and knowing cast before she spoke again.

"They said that you were dead. I had a letter from Sir Henry's brother, George, to that effect Apparently you died at dawn three years ago in 1886, from injuries bravely received, away in some darker-than usual corner of the darkest continent I must say you look very well, considering.

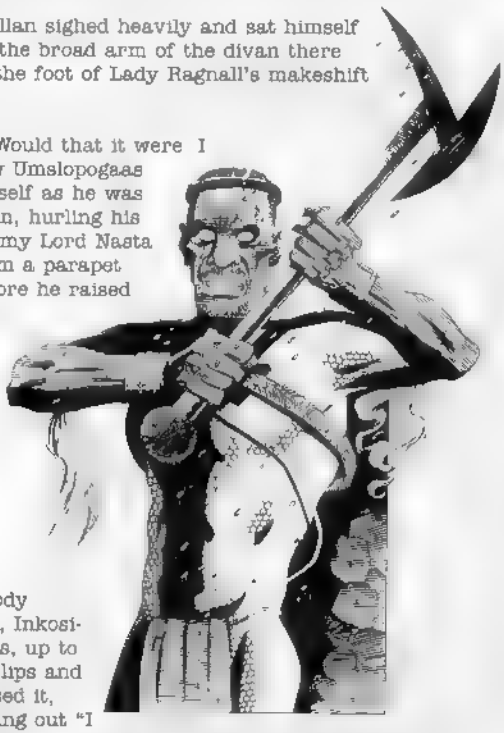
The legendary hunter and adventurer shuffled uncomfortably and seemed to duck his head within the collar of his long and trailing coat. There was the faintest shadow of a wince accompanying his reply

"I'd had enough Surely you know me well enough to understand that? All of the fighting, all the glories and triumphs of my youth, it all became too loud for me somehow Too rowdy and too wearying to someone of my years, but what was I to do? A world enthused by Mr. Haggard's somewhat overblown and generous accounts of my adventures would not suffer me to rest, would never tolerate the thought of Allan Quatermain, now grey and doddering, pruning his roses in some leaden suburb No, I gave them what they wanted a heroic death and an untended grave in some unreachably far corner of the world Having provided my admirers with a suitable conclusion, I am free to live my afterlife, whatever span I have remaining, as my own."

Here Lady Ragnall levered herself up laboriously until she was propped up by one elbow in her nest of coverlet and pillow. Narrowing her eyes, head tilted in a bird like manner to one side she scrutinized him shrewdly

"It was all a yarn, then? All that business that George Curtis mentioned in the letter that he sent, concerning a lost kingdom called Zu-Vendis? Why, he told me that Sir Henry Curtis was now king there and would be no more returning to these isles He said that you were slain and so too was the Zulu friend you spoke of once. Umslopogaas, was that his name? As George reported things, your warrior companion fell heroically in battle against plotters who might otherwise have robbed Sir Henry of his life Was this all smoke and mirrors to accompany your vanishing act, Mr Quatermain?"

Allan sighed heavily and sat himself on the broad arm of the divan there at the foot of Lady Ragnall's makeshift bed



"Would that it were I saw Umslopogaas myself as he was slain, hurling his enemy Lord Nasta from a parapet before he raised his bloody axe, Inkosikaas, up to his lips and kissed it, crying out "I die, I die, but 'twas a kingly fray." No, that was real enough, as was Zu-Vendis and my friend Sir Henry's marriage to its Queen, Nyleptha Only my demise was sham, a ruse to grant me freedom from my suffocating reputation."

Lady Ragnall looked away from Allan and stared thoughtfully towards the far recesses of the candle-shadowed library, where the explorer noticed that her nubian maidservant was at work building a fire within the room's sole marble hearth With some surprise he realized that the girl was tearing pages from the folio editions ranked upon the library's many shelves to feed the fledgling blaze The dowager's chapped voice dragged his attention back to where her frail form nestled in its improvised, untidy cot

"And yet you came back here. And why was that, I wonder?" Her ancient, knowing eyes were rested now on Quatermain once more, as he met her gaze he understood that she already knew the answer to her question, would not be deceived by

Allan and the Sundered Veil

tales of him having returned out of concern for her welfare His reply was brief and truthful

"The taduki. I returned for the taduki."

Lady Ragnall smiled Taduki, strangest of narcotics, to which she alone had access With taduki, one might rend the veil of Time and be immersed in former lives, as Allan's own adventure with the Ivory Boy would readily attest. With taduki, one might easily escape ones present self and circumstances

"Ah, taduki. The drug owns us, doesn't it? Addicted to the taste of previous lives we let our current ones go hang. I let my castle fall to ruin while taduki leads me down the byways of eternity Marisa here prepares it for me, all my other servants fled."

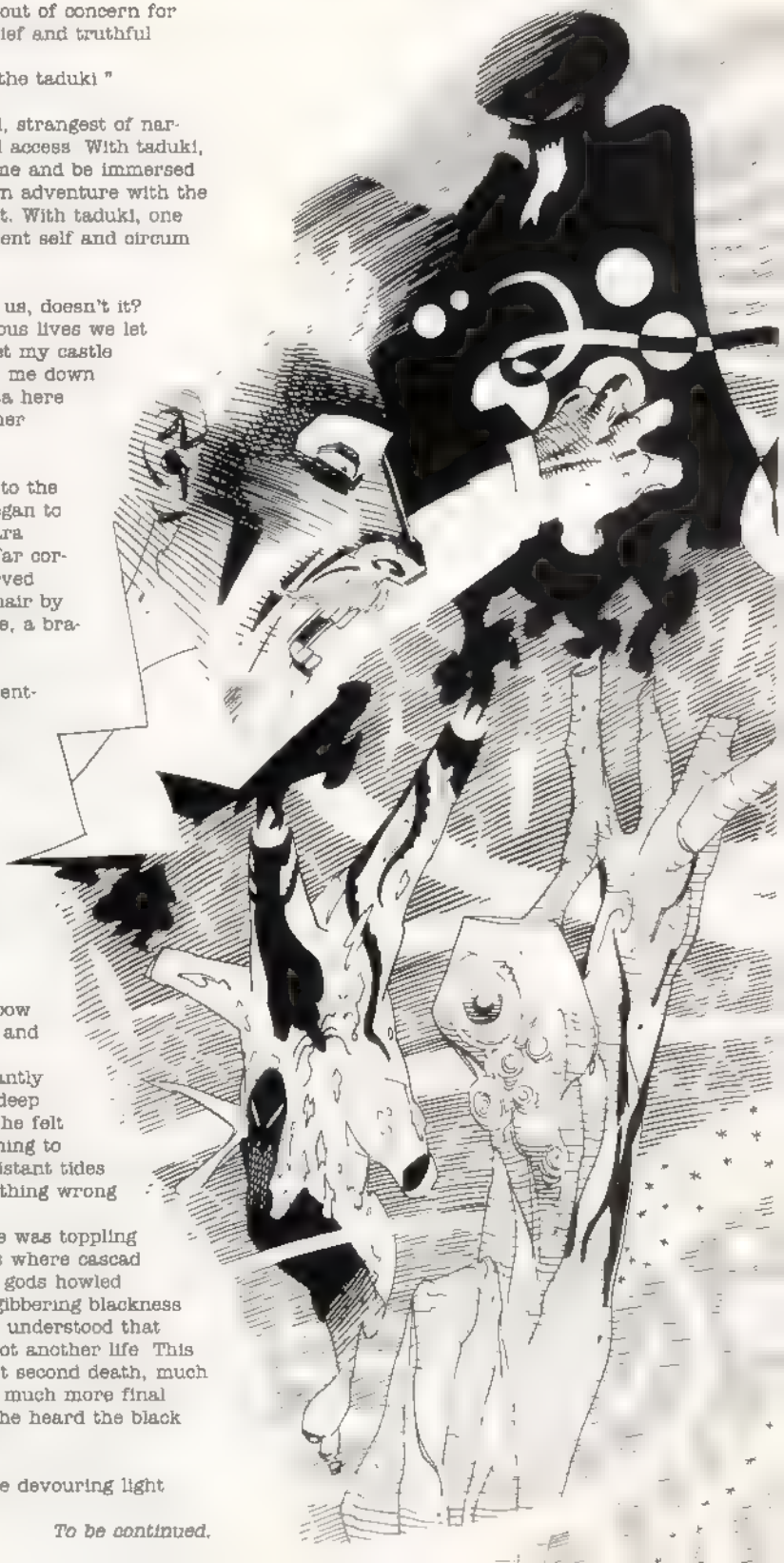
Here Lady Ragnall signaled to the negro woman, who at once began to gather an array of curious paraphernalia from the library's far corner, setting it upon a low, carved table near a weathered armchair by the bed Allan could see a pipe, a brazier, some powdered leaves

The serving girl Marisa patiently lit charcoal in the brazier Looking meaningfully into Allan's eyes, she handed him the pipe Propped on her pillows, Lady Ragnall watched with vicarious anticipation as the great explorer held the bowl to catch the brazier's fumes, his lips pursing around the pipe's elaborately decorated stem

Marisa dropped a pinch of powdered leaves onto the brazier and as the vapours hissed up, Quatermain inhaled. The instantly familiar scent coiled tendrils deep within his skull, and even as he felt his present personality beginning to dissolve before the drug's insistant tides he knew that there was something wrong

The library fell away and he was toppling through a hideous alien abyss where cascaded foreign stars and dreadful gods howled from the Universe's rim. As gibbering blackness swallowed him, the dead man understood that this time the taduki offered not another life This time it offered him naught but second death, much less heroic than his first, but much more final Far off, as in another world, he heard the black manservant start to scream

Then there was nothing save devouring light



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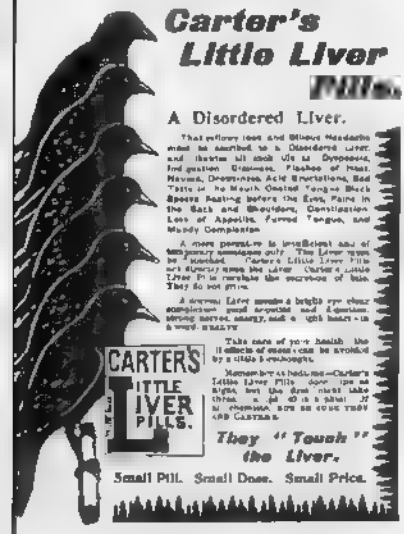

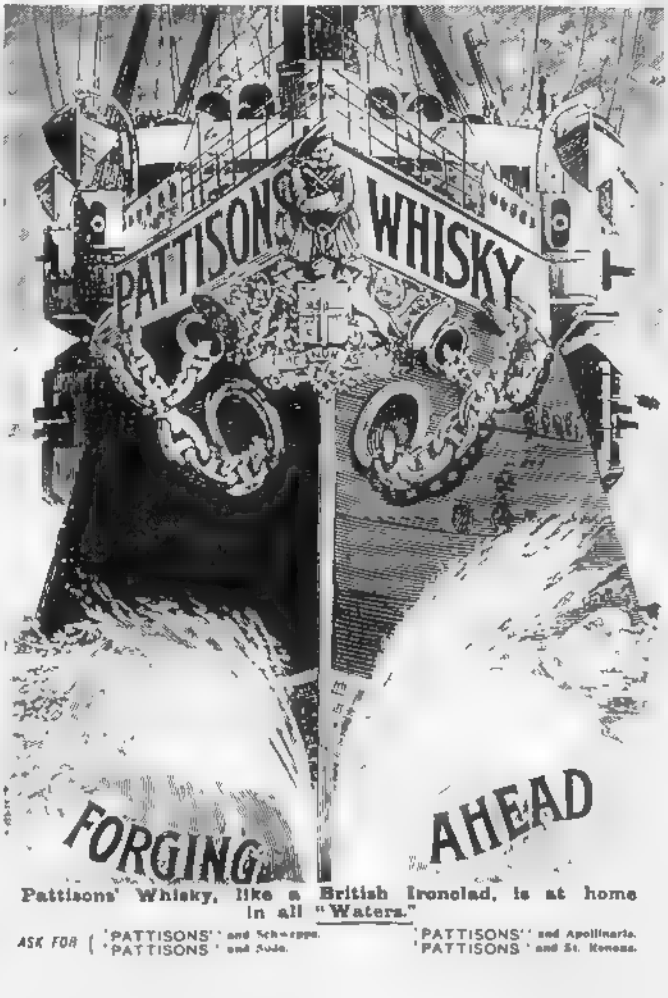
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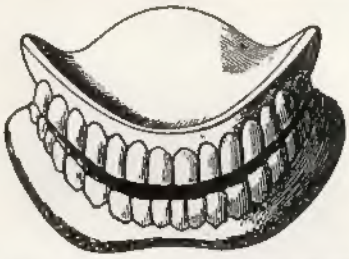

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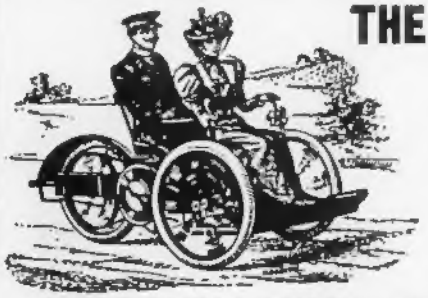

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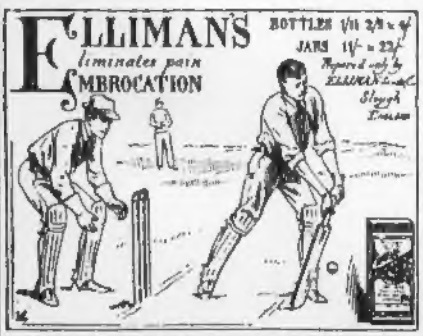

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